

First 5 California
Comprehensive Approaches to
Raising Educational Standards
(CARES) Plus

Frequently Asked Questions
December 17, 2010

EVALUATION

1. Are CLASS assessors and CARES Plus Advisors intended to be the same person?

Answer: No. First 5 California is securing a contract with a third-party vendor to hire staff for CLASS assessments. CARES Plus Advisors are coordinated through the county lead agency to provide support to individual participants in developing educational plans, and may be paid staff or participants in Component C.

2. When is it anticipated that the CARES Plus database will be ready?

Answer: It is anticipated that the CARES Plus Database will be ready during Summer 2011.

3. Why would the collaborative agencies need to “facilitate collection of CLASS assessment data into the CARES Plus Database” if First 5 California is going to train a cadre of CLASS assessors who may simply provide assessment results to the lead agency for data entry or do it themselves?

Answer: CLASS assessment data will be input into the CARES Plus Database by the CLASS assessor. Counties will facilitate collection of CLASS assessment data in that they will distribute and collect consent forms and coordinate the assignments of assessors together with First 5 California.

4. For those participants doing CORE requirements, and are not randomly selected to have a CLASS observation done by First 5 California, is it appropriate for them to score themselves on CLASS?

Answer: No. CLASS is not intended for self-assessment.

5. On the CARES Plus informational conference call, First 5 California staff indicated that participants would use an ID and password to access the online Introduction to CLASS and Looking at CLASSrooms. How will these be generated? Will local counties have to request individual IDs and passwords from First 5 California? Please explain how this will work.

Answer: First 5 California is developing a protocol for the dissemination of individual passwords to access the online Introduction to CLASS. CARES Plus lead agencies will be notified when this information is available.

6. If a participant can document that they have been previously trained on CLASS by a certified trainer within the last two years, do they still have to complete the Introduction to CLASS Training?

Answer: Yes. CLASS observations are a component of the statewide evaluation for CARES Plus. First 5 California is securing a contract with a third-party vendor to hire staff to conduct these CLASS observations at no cost to the counties. Counties are encouraged to conduct additional CLASS assessments to augment local evaluation.

7. Can a county bring participants together in a group setting to complete the Introduction to CLASS training? Many of our participants do not have Internet access.

Answer: Yes. However, since the Introduction to CLASS is an on-line self-paced course, bringing together participants who do not have Internet access together in a group setting is a decision that may be made by the lead agency and the collaborative partners.

8. How can participants who do not have Internet access complete the Looking at CLASSroom requirements?

Answer: It is the responsibility of the lead agency and the collaborative partners to address issues of Internet access for participants to complete LAC requirements.

9. Please verify that the Introduction to CLASS and Looking at CLASSrooms online trainings are only available in English.

Answer: The Introduction to CLASS will be available in Spanish in January 2012. The Looking at CLASSroom online trainings are currently available only in English.

10. We would like to preview CLASS videos prior to making a decision about submitting the application. Is this an option available to counties?

Answer: No. CLASS videos will not be available prior to application submission, since the 6-month user license that will be purchased by First 5 California is for use by CARES Plus participants only.

11. Do I understand the RFA correctly in that participants from a home-based program, such as Early Head Start (EHS), would not be able to participate in CARES Plus, as CLASS is really an assessment tool based on classroom activity? Or can CLASS be used somehow in evaluating the socialization piece to a home-based EHS program?

Answer: Family child care staff working in licensed child care homes are encouraged to participate in the CARES Plus program. CLASS assessments will be performed in a variety of settings, including center-based preschool classrooms, toddler classrooms (year 2 only), and licensed family child care homes.

12. Will we be able to export current data maintained from previous CARES years into the new CARES Plus database? If so, what program will be used to import it? Will we be able to run reports from the database?

Answer: Data previously maintained in the CARES database will not be converted and included within the new CARES Plus Database. While the specifics of reporting have yet to be defined in the new CARES Plus Database, reporting will be supported.

FISCAL

1. What is the expectation regarding the match? Is it the expectation that the match be secured prior to submitting the RFA, or by completion of the planning phase?

Answer: The funding partners must be identified on the CARES Plus Application, Form 6, and the total local fund match must be identified on Forms 9A and 9B at the time the application is submitted. In addition, Section V.D.7.d. of the RFA states that the draft Consortia and Effectiveness and Access Plans must include the local partner agencies included in the local consortia, along with the resources they bring to the consortia and their roles.

2. What if the secured match goes away due to unforeseeable circumstances?

Answer: The CARES Plus match is a required component of funding. If a lead agency cannot immediately secure an alternative source of match funding for the approved funding allocation, First 5 California will reduce the county allocation to ensure compliance with the CARES Plus match requirement. A lead agency must immediately notify First 5 California of any change in cash match commitment.

3. It says in the RFA that Federal ARRA dollars may be used for the match. Does this include ARRA dollars that come through the California Department of Education, such as the Child Care Initiative Project, California Preschool Instructional Network, etc.? Currently, these programs are funded 100% by ARRA funds.

Answer: No. ARRA dollars directed to a State agency are not eligible for the local cash match. However, ARRA dollars that go directly to local entities (i.e., Head Start programs) may be used to meet the local cash match.

4. Three counties want to plan for a tri-county CARES Plus Program. If after the tri-county planning phase one county no longer wants to participate in CARES Plus, will the lead agency that facilitated the tri-county planning still receive all three counties' planning and development funding?

Answer: First 5 California will not reimburse lead agencies for expenditures occurring in Phase I for programs that are not implemented in Phase II. First 5 California encourages lead agencies to establish written agreements with the tri-county participants on the commitments between the lead agency and participating counties to mitigate liability in this area.

5. We (a University of California campus) have been heading up the local CARES program since 2002. Are we able to apply as the Local Public Entity should the local Consortium and the local First 5 Commission approve this appointment?

Answer: No. A University of California Campus is not eligible to apply as a local public entity. However, a lead agency may enter into subcontract agreements with other entities to implement the CARES Plus program in its county.

6. We are convening our stakeholders and may need to complete a formal proposal process to select a contractor to administer a portion of the CARES Plus program. The budget form does not seem to indicate that knowing the exact contractor is a requirement for the RFA. Can you please confirm that we can submit a proposal with this detail still being finalized?

Answer: Yes. However, the intent to subcontract and the purpose of the subcontract should be addressed in the lead agency's application consistent with the detail described in the RFA under Section V.D.7.d.

7. We had obtained permission from our County Commissioners to submit the LOI by the December 13, 2010, deadline. However, our next Commission meeting is not until December 16 and we do not have approval from all Commissioners to submit an application. If our Commission directs us to withdraw our LOI, would we need to send another letter stating we are withdrawing the LOI?

Answer: Yes. A local county commission must notify First 5 California immediately if there is any change in its commitment to perform as lead agency for a county.

8. Can a college use the fees students pay when they enroll in Core 8 Courses as a cash match? In addition, would the state funds that colleges receive, often called FTE's (full time equivalency), be considered a cash match?

Answer: No, to both questions.

9. Can colleges use the funds they receive from the California Early Childhood Mentor Program, Child Development Training Consortium, and/or Child Development Career Works Project as cash match (within component B)?

Answer: No. Lead agencies cannot use any state funds to meet the local cash match requirement.

10. Can the Phase I Planning and Development funds be used for CLASS trainings of trainers in order to develop local capacity to later support participants to successfully complete the CORE CLASS requirements (i.e., facilitated computer labs)?

Answer: Phase I Planning and Development funds cannot be used for a training of trainers for CLASS.

11. If a county applies and receives funding for the Phase I planning period and then finds that the program is not going to work, are they committed to continue past June 30, 2010, and receive the annual contract amount? Will the planning money have to be repaid?

Answer: First 5 California will not reimburse lead agencies for expenditures occurring in Phase I for programs that are not implemented in Phase II.

12. If Head Start allocates their qualified staff as Advisors, can it use that time/salary as match?

Answer: Yes, as long as the funding for staff positions are unmatched funds, the agency maintains adequate documentation to demonstrate that staff are assigned to CARES Plus program implementation, and there is adequate tracking of fund source, time, and salary to ensure the expenditures are both auditable and traceable.

13. In our county, the local First 5 commission has opted not to apply for CARES Plus and the County Office of Education will serve as the lead agency. The local First 5 Commission would like to participate as a collaborative partner, but will not provide financial support. When local First 5 completes Form 1, does checking the box marked "...will participate in the CARES Plus program as a member of a county consortium developed by a local public entity but will not be the lead agency..." obligate the local Commission to be a funding partner?

Answer: No. Checking this box on the Letter of Intent does not financially obligate the county commission.

PROGRAM

1. Will new participants be accepted in Program Year 2 (2012-13)?

Answer: Yes. New participants will be accepted in Program Year 2 and will be required to complete all of the CORE requirements. New Year 2 preschool teachers will complete the LAC; new Year 2 toddler and infant teachers will complete the LAC-Toddler (LAC-T) as part of the CORE requirements.

2. May programs allow non-English-speaking participants to enroll in Component A or B in lieu of LAC until it is available in Spanish?

Answer: No. This is not an acceptable programmatic alternative.

3. License-exempt providers are not eligible. What about tribal license-exempt preschool programs?

Answer: Section J.b. of the RFA explains that facilities exempt from licensure either because they are administered by a tribal council or located on a U.S. military installation are eligible.

4. Can a county's "additional requirements beyond the RFA minimums" for Component B require that coursework be degree-eligible? That is, can we choose not to accept permit-applicable coursework?

Answer: No. Counties may not exclude units that are applicable to obtaining a degree and/or child development permit/CDA as described in section G.2.a. of the CARES Plus RFA.

5. Section F of the RFA states that "Local CARES Plus programs must offer support to participants to ensure that information learned through these professional development tools is integrated into all aspects of the participant's classrooms." What do you mean by that sentence?

Answer: The expectation is that counties will develop strategies to assist participants in taking what they have learned in CARES Plus training and apply it in classroom settings to improve both the quality of early learning programs and, ultimately, young children's learning and developmental outcomes.

6. Please clarify the requirement that each county consortium target its efforts in Priority Zone communities where "the local school ranks within the bottom five deciles of California's Academic Performance index (API)."

Answer: Counties are required to target those schools that receive an API ranking in Deciles 1-5; please see section I.2. of the RFA.

7. Please cite the research showing that LAC helps improve teacher effectiveness.

Answer: Looking at CLASSrooms (LAC) is a video library designed to enable teachers to view a vast array of effective classroom practices in action. It is not a stand-alone program; rather, it is designed to enhance the research-based training components included in CARES Plus by allowing teachers to observe the strategies and approaches from their CARES Plus training in real classroom settings. While there has not been isolated research conducted on the LAC, per se, there is a sizeable body of research to support the positive impact of teachers observing effective practices and student/teacher interactions in demonstration classrooms. The LAC incorporates and makes available these kinds of observations. Through this initial cycle of CARES Plus, First 5 California will collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of each of its CORE and Component requirements in order to inform future program investments.

8. Can a county use its Local Planning Council (LPC) data to determine the supply of early childhood providers?

Answer: Yes.

9. Does administrative staff need to have provided direct care with 0-5 year olds for 9 months of the previous year? Or, do they need to prove that they directly supervised 0-5 teachers for 9 months of the previous year?

Answer: Yes to both. Either direct care or supervised experience is acceptable.

10. Is Form 6 only for funding partners, the LPC, and AB 212?

Answer: Page 1 of Form 6 is used to list all funding partners. Page 2 of form 6 is used to gather the signatures of the two required collaborative partners (Local Child Care Planning Council and the local AB 212 local initiatives). Page 3 of Form 6 is optional and it is used to list other collaborative partners.

11. Must a provider who is working with infants or toddlers do the LAC in Year 1 (2011-12)?

Answer: No. A provider working with infant and toddlers is not required to complete LAC in Year 1. However, they are required to participate in either component A or B along with the other CORE requirements. During year 2, they are required to complete Looking at Toddlers (LAC-T); adding a component is optional.

12. If a county chooses to implement Components A and B, can they set guidelines for participants regarding which Component they must complete? For example, could a county require that any participant who has not achieved an AA degree to complete Component B?

Answer: Yes. The RFA sets the minimum requirements for participation. It is a local decision to set guidelines based on county needs. Every participant is required to meet with an Advisor, who should also be able to add input and suggestions to an individual's Professional Development Plan.

13. If a county offers Component B, can it restrict which colleges from which it will accept units?

Answer: Counties may not exclude colleges that offer units that are applicable to obtaining a degree and/or child development permit/CDA, as described in section G.2.a. of the CARES Plus RFA.

14. On the informational conference call, First 5 California staff stated that counties that are applying to do Component D do not need to include costs related to Component D in their budgets. How should we plan for the stipends we will have to pay if our application to participate in Component D is accepted? Will we be able to revise our budget to include these stipends after we are selected?

Answer: Those counties selected to participate in Component D will receive technical assistance on implementing all matters related to Component D, including planning and budgeting.

15. Can a county set priorities for participants completing Component A for which trainings they should take?

Answer: Yes. Every participant is required to meet with an Advisor who should also be able to provide input and suggestions to a participant's Professional Development Plan.

16. In the RFA, it states that a participant must complete a Professional Development Plan at the beginning and end of each year. If a participant completed all of his/her requirements during the first half of the year, could he/she complete the follow-up Professional Development Plan earlier?

Answer: Yes. Participants are encouraged to meet with an Advisor and continue their professional development.

17. In the RFA, it states that a participant must identify two areas of CLASS they will work on during the year on the Professional Development Plan they complete at the beginning of the year. How was First 5 California envisioning this process to work?

Answer: The expectation is that every participant will complete the Intro to CLASS, and then meet with their Advisor. This will enable them to identify two areas from CLASS they will work on during the year.

18. Must teachers serving infants and toddlers complete the LAC-T during year 2 along with component A or B?

Answer: No. The Component is an option as illustrated in the chart below: **

CARES Plus 2-Year Participant Requirements by Child's Age Group

Child's Age Group	Year 1	Year 2
Preschool	CORE	Component Only
Toddler	CORE (minus LAC) Component	Toddler LAC (LAC-T) Component is optional
Infant	CORE (minus LAC) Component	Toddler LAC Component is optional

Chart assumes the same person participates in CARES Plus for both program years.

**** NOTE: This is a change from the original RFA and is reflected in the Errata dated December 17, 2010.**

GENERAL

1. Will CLASS and LAC be available during Phase I for Cares Plus staff and advisors to complete before Phase II implementation?

Answer: No. Due to limited funding, First 5 California will train only CLASS observers and My Teaching Partner coaches for implementation during Phase II..

2. Since the CARES Plus application process is non-competitive, what will happen in the event a county does not submit an adequate application? What will be the process for working with these counties and their application?

Answer: First 5 California staff will work with counties that need additional assistance with their application to the extent practicable and feasible.